

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES.

A History of the Birds of Ceylon.

By Captain W. VINCENT LEGGE, R.A. London, 1880. 4to.

THIS work, of which the first part was issued in November 1878, has been completed by the publication of part 3, in September 1880. It consists of nearly 1300 closely printed pages in 4to, and is illustrated by 34 coloured plates, a map, and several woodcuts. All the leisure time which the author could spare from his military duties during a residence of eight years and a half in Ceylon, and the incessant labour of three other years after his return to England, were devoted to its preparation.

Yet, voluminous as the work is, it includes accounts of 371 species only of the fauna of Ceylon; and it is therefore evident that the author had a great deal to say upon his subject, and that in its treatment he relied rather on his eye and pen than on the skill of his artist. In fact, the book bears on every page the stamp of being written by a man who combined the method of the systematic student with the experience of the field-naturalist. The author's object was not only to produce a scientific account of the birds of the island, but to write it in such a manner as to render its contents acceptable to the educated class of the inhabitants, and to inspire them with a taste for the study of birds. In both respects he has succeeded so well that, without hesitation, we can commend the work as a pattern to all faunistic workers. The plates belong to the best productions of M. Keulemans, and represent the species peculiar to the island.

As regards the arrangement of the text, the article on each bird is composed of six parts, viz. synonymy, description, observations, geographical distribution, habits, and nidification. The descriptions go considerably beyond the limits of a diagnosis, yet are as concise and generalized as the variations of plumage of the species will admit. The "observations" are given chiefly for the benefit of the local student, and furnish collateral information as to continental specimens of the same species, or as to other species representing the Ceylonese types in India or elsewhere. The geographical distribution is worked out in a very elaborate manner, and must have cost the author immense labour, on account of the number of works which he had to consult critically. The distribution within the island, the habits, and nidification are based chiefly upon the author's own observations. Only, owing to the difficulty of observing the birds on their nests, and of obtaining reliable information, he has had to avail himself of the assistance gathered from A. Hume's works on Indian oology, though he obtained many original notes from a valued correspondent, Mr. Parker. As regards that incubus of every ornithological work, the synonymy, the author, very properly, has limited his references to the most important publications, paying particular attention to those which contain local information on the occurrence of a species in Ceylon. For the author found Ceylonese ornithology not an entirely uncultivated

field of the Indian fauna. Besides Blyth, whose labours now possess rather an historical interest, Mr. Layard and Mr. Holdsworth had made most important contributions to our knowledge of the birds of the island—the former adding not less than 110 species to the lists previously published, and supplying valuable information on their habits, in a paper which he contributed to the pages of this journal nearly thirty years ago; whilst the latter supplemented Layard's list by 24 species, thus bringing the total number of Ceylonese birds to 326, in a carefully edited paper which appeared in 1872 in the 'Proceedings of the Zoological Society.' As mentioned in the beginning of this notice, Captain Legge enumerates 371 species; of these, two Finches are known to have been introduced, and eighteen other species rest upon doubtful evidence*. Forty-seven species prove to be peculiar to the island, as are also the two genera or subgenera *Elaphrornis* and *Sturnornis*. The majority of these species are nearly allied to hill-forms of the continent of India and Malayasia; and two crested Eagles of the genus *Spizaëtus*, with the peculiar species of Flycatchers, Bulbuls, and Babbling Thrushes, represent closely allied forms inhabiting the Himalayas and Nilgherries. The author considers that the avifauna of Ceylon, taken as a whole, is very closely allied to that of the southern portion of the peninsula of India—a conclusion which fully agrees with our present knowledge of the Reptilian fauna. He further points out that in the hill-regions of the countries where the rainfall is similar, the near affinity of the species is remarkable. The low-lying portions in the north of the island possess a similar avifauna to that of the Carnatic, and from that direction receive a cloud of migrants in the cool season.

Although the fauna of an island which, like Ceylon, is in close proximity to a continent does not possess that intense interest which attaches to that of oceanic islands, it is nevertheless of the highest importance to Biology that the fauna of a district with such defined limits should be worked out completely and in detail, in order to enable the students of future generations to perceive and appreciate those changes which, as we know, are constantly taking place in the distribution, habits, and characteristics of the species. Therefore the importance of this work is to be measured not only by its value to the specialist of the present day, but no less so by the help it offers with respect to those wide biological questions, the solution of which depends on conscientious and accurate records like those contained in the present work.

A Monograph of the Free and Semi-parasitic Copepoda of the British Islands. By GEORGE STEWARDSON BRADY, M.D., F.L.S. 3 vols. 8vo. London, Ray Society, 1878–1880.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary in these pages to say any thing in general praise of the Ray Society or of the admirable series of

* One of these, *Schœnicola platyura* deserves to be included in the number of Ceylonese species, as a specimen in the British Museum is of undoubted authenticity, and its claim to this fauna is at least as strong as that of *Neophron ginginianus*.